Family Star
(Relationships)™
The Outcomes Star for protecting children from conflict between parents
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Please contact info@triangleconsulting.co.uk to enquire about buying a licence and training.

Licences may be available for those wishing to translate this report into other languages.

The Outcomes Star™
This Star is part of a family of Outcomes Star tools. For other versions of the Outcomes Star, good practice and further information see www.outcomesstar.org.uk.

Acknowledgements
Many people have contributed to the development of the Outcomes Star over its long evolution and we would like to thank all the clients, workers, managers, funders, academics and commissioners who have generously given their time and expertise.

The original commission for an outcome measurement system came from St Mungo’s, with financial support from the London Housing Foundation, and Triangle recognises their vital roles in the development of the Outcomes Star. We would also like to acknowledge Kate Graham’s important contribution to the development of the suite of Stars, both as a founding partner of Triangle and as co-author of the original Outcomes Star (now called the Outcomes Star for Homelessness).

We would particularly like to thank Essex County Council and Hertfordshire County Council as the collaborators for the development of this version of the Star.
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1. Introduction

The Outcomes Star is a suite of person-centred tools for supporting and measuring change when working with people, including versions for children, people with learning difficulties and people with long term health conditions.

Family Star (Relationships) has been developed for parents, and others with a key parenting role, who need support to tackle disagreements in a healthy way.

All versions of the Outcomes Star have a number of five- or ten-point scales arranged in a star shape. Each point on each scale has detailed descriptors setting out the attitudes and behaviour typical of that point on the scale. Underpinning these scales is a model of change (the Journey of Change) describing the steps towards the end goal that both the service and service user are trying to achieve.

In the case of the Family Star (Relationships), the end goal is **effective co-parenting**, where there are no concerns about any conflict in the parent’s relationship having a negative impact on their children.

Like all versions of the Outcomes Star, the Family Star (Relationships) is both a keywork tool, supporting effective interventions, and an outcomes tool, giving management data on progress towards the end outcome. Because of this dual role, it brings together measurement and service delivery and can provide a shared language and framework across operations and performance management departments and between commissioners and service providers.

The Family Star (Relationships) has the following resources:

- The Family Star (Relationships) Chart, Notes and Action Plan for use with parents
- The Family Star (Relationships) User Guide, with both brief visual scales and detailed scale descriptions, which can be shared with parents as needed
- The short-illustrated Scales for use with parents
- The Guidance for Workers, providing guidance on how to use the Family Star (Relationships)
- A web application for online completion and analysis at www.staronline.org.uk.

Background and further information about the Outcomes Star suite of tools can be found at [www.outcomesstar.org.uk](http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk).

About this Development Report

This report outlines the theoretical foundations for the Family Star (Relationships), the process of its development and the research that supports it. The report includes analysis of the psychometric properties of the pilot version of the tool and further research into the
psychometric properties of the final tool is planned. For the latest information on this please contact info@triangleconsulting.co.uk.

2. Theoretical foundations of the Outcomes Star™

A new approach to outcomes measurement

The approach underpinning the Family Star (Relationships) and all versions of the Outcomes Star is an original way of dealing with assessment and outcomes measurement. It draws on the core principles of Participatory Action Research (O’Brien, 2001; Carr & Kemmis, 1986) – empowerment, collaboration and integration – and extends them beyond research into assessment and outcome measurement. Participatory Action Research seeks to empower the subjects of research, collaborate with them and integrate research into practical action to improve people’s lives. For a fuller summary please see MacKeith (2011).

In the same way, the Family Star (Relationships) seeks to empower service users within a collaborative process of assessment and measurement that is integrated with support work rather than a separate activity.

Empowerment

Underpinning the Star is a belief that, in order for change to take place in people’s lives, service providers need to harness the motivation, understanding and skills of the person themselves to create change.

Practical changes in life circumstances (such as finding appropriate childcare or meeting a new partner) may be very important, but they are often not in themselves enough to enable people to achieve their goals. A key active ingredient in achieving sustained outcomes is change that takes place within the individual. For this reason, the primary focus in the Family Star (Relationships) is the relationship of the individual to the challenges that they face.

Service users and front-line workers report that the Star provides a much more empowering context for keywork than other approaches because service users are active participants in the process rather than having assessment done to them. Being involved in their own process of change – and the validation of their experiences and perceptions – is often critical in helping them make the changes they seek (Burns, MacKeith & Graham, 2008). In contrast, when the assessment and measurement process requires service users to be passive objects of the expertise of others, it can reinforce the disempowerment and lack of self-worth that may have contributed to their need for help in the first place.
Collaboration

When using the Family Star (Relationships), the worker and parent assess the parent’s needs together. The parent bases their assessment on their knowledge and understanding of themselves, and the worker applies their professional experience of working with others and their observations and reflections on this person’s behaviour. The assessment emerges through a dialogue between parent and worker and this may result in a change in the perceptions of both.

The Star makes the model of change explicit and the information that is collected is immediately presented back to the service user as a completed Star. This allows the service user and worker to take an overview together and to reflect on the completed Star as a basis for deciding what actions are needed. The service user takes an active role in defining issues, identifying actions and thinking about consequences for themselves. As a result they are much more likely to be behind the plan that emerges from the completed Star.

This contrasts with extractive approaches to assessment and measurement in which the expert collects “data” from the service user and takes that data away to make an assessment on their own. They may then decide what course of action is most appropriate and try to persuade the service user that this is the best way forward for them.

Integration

Completing the Star is an integral part of working with the service user and is intended to support as well as measure change. For the service user, the process of participating in the assessment, engaging with the model of change and reflecting on the data the Star presents can result in change. It can also have the same impact on the staff and carers working with the person. In addition, the assessment dialogue and the Journey of Change that underpins the Star naturally lead to discussion of next steps and action planning. As a result, the assessment becomes an integral part of the intervention.

This contrasts with traditional approaches in which the collection of data is seen as a separate process to the intervention and may be regarded as intrusive by workers and service users. The differences between the Star and traditional approaches to measurement are summarised on the next page.
Many traditional approaches

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<th>Empowerment</th>
<th>Family Star (Relationships)</th>
<th>Many traditional approaches</th>
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<tr>
<td>Parents are seen as active co-producers of change</td>
<td>Service users are seen as passive recipients of help, with “experts” having the knowledge to devise solutions</td>
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<td>Their motivation, understanding, beliefs and skills are often key to creating change, while recognising external factors beyond their control</td>
<td>The focus is on the severity of the issue</td>
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<td>The focus is on the parent’s relationship with the issue</td>
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<th>Collaboration</th>
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<td>The worker and parent collaborate in assessment, with the potential to build a shared perspective on issues and the action needed</td>
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<td>These employ either self-report measures or professional assessment measurement tools that don’t build a shared perspective</td>
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<th>Integration</th>
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<td>Assessment and measurement are an integral part of keywork</td>
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<td>Assessment and measurement are additional tasks that can be resented by workers as a distraction from &quot;real&quot; work</td>
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3. The development process: methodology and findings

The methodology for developing all versions of the Outcomes Star is based on Action Research (O’Brien, 2001) and the Existential Phenomenological research method (McCall, 1983). Action Research is a collaborative process of identifying issues, trying out solutions and assessing what works. This phenomenological method places a strong emphasis on understanding the subjective experience of the person or people being researched and the meaning of the experience for them.

Ensuring that parent and worker perspectives were central to the development process, the Family Star (Relationships) was developed in collaboration with services providing support to parents to resolve inter-parental conflict. There was an expert working group overseeing the process which consisted of managers and workers from the collaborating organisations.

The development of the Family Star (Relationships) consisted of three main stages:

Stage 1: Establishing the need for the Family Star (Relationships)
Stage 2: Identifying the model of change and desired outcomes for parents
Stage 3: Consultation, piloting, and refining

This section of the report sets out the process and findings of each stage of the development process.

Stage 1. Establishing the need for the Family Star (Relationships)

Essex County Council, later joined by Hertfordshire County Council, approached Triangle to develop this version of the Star in response to recent research into the importance of the relationship between couples in terms of outcomes for their children, whether the couples are together or separated. The collaborators already used the Outcomes Star in their family work but realised that, where inter-parental conflict was an issue for a family, the tool needed to be able to focus on the specific needs and outcomes of those families.

They thought the Star would be the right tool for this as they had already got good service user feedback from services using the Star and knew that it provided the outcomes information needed by commissioners.

Stage 2. Identifying the model of change and desired outcomes for parents

Workshop 1 (January 2017): A one-day workshop was held to identify intended outcomes and processes of change in work supporting parents to tackle inter-parental conflict in a healthy way. This workshop was attended by an expert working group made up of professionals including the Head of Commissioning at Essex County Council, the Director of Social Investment from the Stephanou Foundation and Operational Managers from both a Children’s Centre and the Local Schools Partnership. The workshop consisted of a series of activities to provide insight about their experiences of working with parents and the criteria needed to determine whether the support that is delivered to parents to address inter-parental conflict results in positive change.

The key questions asked in Workshop 1 for all versions of the Outcomes Star are as follows:

- What are the main areas in which services and service users are seeking to create change? These areas become the points of the Star
- What is the desired outcome of the change process? This becomes the end point on the Journey of Change that underpins all the scales
- What model of change describes the steps that service users take on the journey towards that end point? This is described in a series of steps – the Journey of Change – showing a clearly discernible, qualitative difference between each step of the journey.
A range of techniques were used to draw out participants’ subjective experience and knowledge including:

- Using the Outcome Triangle tool to identify the overall aim of services, the specific outcomes they are trying to achieve and the activities they carry out to achieve these changes
- Bringing to mind an individual who has undergone a substantial change and identifying the key steps involved in their process of change
- Hearing feedback about suggested outcome areas and discussing how they would work in different situations and with different service users.

Triangle compiled all the material gathered from the working group at Workshop 1 and reviewed it to allow meaning and common strands to emerge. An initial review of the literature was also conducted to examine outcome areas found to be important for helping parents to reduce inter-parental conflict, as well as looking at existing outcome measurement and assessment tools used with this service user group. On the basis of this learning, the provisional model of change and outcome areas for the Family Star (Relationships) were developed. These were then used as an outline or ‘skeleton’, from which the first draft of the Family Star (Relationships) was created.

**Workshop 2 (April 2017):** A one-day workshop was held to present the first draft of the Family Star (Relationships) to a broader working group (including practitioners that were present at Workshop 1) and to hear feedback to inform the pilot version of the Star.

Following Workshop 2 there was an iterative process of sharing, listening, refining and sharing again to hone the outcome areas, Journey of Change and descriptions of the steps towards change in each outcome area until they resonated with the parents and workers participating in the development process. This process resulted in the pilot version of the Family Star (Relationships).

The Journey of Change and outcome areas for the Family Star (Relationships) that emerged from the analysis are shown overleaf:
The pilot Family Star (Relationships) Journey of Change

5 Effective collaboration
4 Finding what works
3 Believing and trying
2 Know things need to change
1 Stuck

The pilot Family Star (Relationships) Outcome Areas

1 Practical arrangements
2 Routines and stability
3 Home and money
4 Boundaries and behaviour
5 Meeting emotional needs
6 Relationship skills
7 Managing strong feelings
8 Your well-being

Stage 3. Consultation, piloting and refining

Practitioners from children centres, family services and mediation services were trained to use the pilot version of the Family Star (Relationships) and piloted the tool over a six-month period. Data gathered during the pilot was analysed to test the tools’ psychometric properties and feedback forms from workers and parents were used to test the Star’s acceptability and inform the need for further changes.

Parent feedback

- Triangle received 30 completed questionnaires from parents who had used the Family Star (Relationships) during the pilot period
- 93% of parents indicated that they thought that their completed Family Star (Relationships) was a good summary of their life and needs
- 72% of parents enjoyed completing the Family Star (Relationships)
- 80% of parents said that the scales helped them to understand what they needed in the way of support
- 77% of parents agreed that the scales described how life was for them at the moment
- 77% of parents did not think that the Family Star (Relationships) took too long to complete
• 46% of parents who completed more than one Star reading found the progress that they had made from their initial Star reading encouraging

**Worker feedback**

• Triangle received 19 feedback forms from workers completing the Star with parents

• 83% of workers reported that the Family Star (Relationships) described the situation, strengths and needs of parents fairly well or very well

• 79% of workers agreed the Star helped them get an overall picture of a parent’s situation and needs

• Nearly half of workers felt that it did not take too long to complete the Star with parents

• Nearly two thirds agreed that the Star helped them focus work with parents

• 40% of workers found it encouraging to see the progress that clients made between Star readings

See Appendix 1 for more detail on parent and worker feedback.

**Analysis of the pilot data**

The Star data collected during the pilot of the Family Star (Relationships) was analysed in order to provide an initial assessment of the psychometric properties of the pilot Star. A fairly small number of Star readings were completed, with 43 first readings and 22 reviews so these findings are tentative, and a larger sample and longer time-period will be used when formally evaluating the psychometric properties of the final version of the Family Star (Relationships).

**Distribution**

Analysis of the data showed that across the Star scales there were parents with readings at all stages of the Journey of Change, indicating that that all stages are meaningful in capturing a parent’s current situation (see Appendix 2) and the data was not skewed for any of the outcome areas.

**Internal consistency**

The Family Star (Relationships) was found to have a high level of internal consistency (Cronbach’s α = .87), with a Cronbach’s α of .7 taken as indicating good internal consistency. Further analysis on a larger data set is needed to confirm the internal consistency of the final version of the Family Star (Relationships).
Item redundancy

Inter-item correlations were at the desired level. The lowest correlations were found between the areas *Your well-being* and *Home and money*, suggesting that these areas are less related to each other than other areas. The highest correlation was seen between *Practical arrangements* and *Routine and stability* suggesting similarity between these areas, but these correlations were not high enough to suggest item-redundancy. See Appendix 3 for inter-item correlations.

**Workshop 3 (April 2018):** Further feedback was gathered on the pilot version of the Family Star (Relationships) at the third and final meeting of the working group. This workshop also provided an opportunity for reviewing the format of the tool, its scope (for example, whether it was unsuitable for any of the service user groups it was piloted with), the guidelines for use and the value of the data generated to the pilot services. This informed the final version of the Family Star (Relationships).

Workshop 3 feedback:

The working group was asked some specific questions about the Family Star (Relationships) and the answers are summarised below.

**What did you think of the pilot Family Star (Relationships)?**

The working group was generally positive about the Family Star (Relationships):

- Members of the working group from Hertfordshire County Council commented that they thought the pilot had been successful

- Essex Family Solutions commented that where needs are not too complex the Family Star (Relationships) is a brilliant tool

- Members of the working group commented that the Family Star (Relationships) is a good tool to open up conversations with parents who are co-parenting

- The members of the working group explained that the Family Star (Relationships) would be really helpful as an extra ‘tool in the toolbox’ to use where difficulties in the relationships were the main focus

- There was overall recognition that this version of the Outcomes Star may not be used very widely but there is enthusiasm for it to be published and available, so practitioners can choose to use it where it is the right version for a family
When did the Family Star (Relationships) work well and not so well?

The working group was asked to discuss any problems they encountered when using the Star during the pilot, where it wasn’t suitable to use and why in some cases it had not been completed with parents.

- Members of the working group from Hertfordshire County Council stated that the Star had worked well in mediation and counselling services and that when it is used with a family at the right time for them to engage it works well.

- Essex Family Solutions explained that they mainly work with parents who are just below the Social Care Intervention threshold and that having lots of complex families on their caseloads can make it difficult to complete Star readings as there often immediate issues that need addressing and prioritising.

- The working group suggested that when used in children centres it can open a can of worms - therefore when it is appropriate to use the Star depends on a family’s specific circumstances and what their relationship with the worker supporting them is like. They found it worked best when looking at it as a basis for asking each parent what they could personally do to reduce conflict in certain areas.

Where does the pilot Family Star (Relationships) need some changes to be made?

The working group thought all areas of the pilot Star were important and that there was very little duplication between areas. The following changes to the pilot Star were suggested:

- To include reference to the negative impact of inter-parental conflict on the child in the sub-heading to help parents understand this.

- To change the top of the Journey of Change to ‘effective parenting’ to reflect that this Star will mainly be used by parents on their own (as opposed to completed in a couple).

- To change the order of the scales.

- To change the bold statements from ‘I/we’ to ‘I’ where appropriate as the Star is likely to be completed with just one parent.

- Make minor wording changes in each of the scales.

Conclusions from the pilot and Workshop 3

The feedback from the pilot shows that parents, workers and managers were generally positive about the Family Star (Relationships). It was found that this Star worked best when
it was completed with one parent on their own rather than with both parents together. The pilot also showed that the Family Star (Relationships) could be used in both mediation and counselling and was more appropriate to use instead of the Family Star Plus in children’s centres where the focus on the work with parents was on difficulties in their relationship. The pilot further confirmed that this Star is not suitable to be used where there is sustained domestic abuse over time or controlling and abusive behaviour in a relationship.

Improvements to the Family Star (Relationships) were agreed at Workshop 3 in the light of the feedback gathered, discussion in the workshop and the psychometric evaluation of the Family Star (Relationships).

In addition to minor wording changes and adjusting the order of the scales, the main changes to the pilot version of the Family Star (Relationships) to create the final version were as follows:

- The sub-heading was changed to include reference to the negative impact of inter-parental conflict on the child
- Stage 5 of the Journey of Change was changed to ‘Effective co-parenting’
- The bold statements were rewritten from ‘I/we’ statement to ‘I’ at stages 1-4 and to ‘Our’ at Stage 5
- The name of Stage 2 was changed to ‘Accepting help’.
4. References


5. Appendices

Appendix 1: Worker and service user feedback following the Family Star (Relationships) pilot

Family Star (Relationships) worker feedback: Triangle received 19 completed feedback forms from workers using the Family Star (Relationships)

- How well did you feel the Relationship Star described the situation, strengths and needs of the people you work with?
  - Fairly well: 83%
  - Very well: 6%
  - Not well: 11%

- Using the Star helped me to get an overall picture of client's situation and needs
  - Agree: 79%
  - Unsure: 21%

- I found the process of completing the Star with clients too long
  - Agree: 32%
  - Unsure: 47%
  - Disagree: 21%

- The scale descriptors help me to understand where to focus next with the clients I work with
  - Agree: 58%
  - Unsure: 37%
  - Disagree: 5%

- I found it encouraging to see the progress that clients had made between Star readings
  - Agree: 29%
  - Unsure: 35%
  - Disagree: 12%
  - Not applicable: 24%
Worker open-ended feedback in response to the Family Star (Relationships):

What did you appreciate about using the Family Star (Relationships)

- It created structure
- It gave a focus
- Given the number of times I met with this couple (3) it was good to see the improvements they made. Although, I found it time consuming to complete the paperwork the Star did help parents understand the issues
- I found the Star a little cumbersome where partners were present with a specific issue - questions were too vague. I could see though that with more time and an opportunity to measure using the Star at intervals might be useful
- It enabled an all-round approach and to see how parties view themselves
- It enabled parents to see each other’s views in a calm and relaxed way. For example, Mum was pleasantly surprised that Dad had scored home and money quite high - she was expecting this to be an issue. Dad in particular seemed anxious when he first arrived. He seemed to settle quite quickly once he saw that there was a formal approach to the meeting - with something concrete on paper
- It ensured fairness in covering same issue for both parents which evidenced the lack of bias which is crucial in mediation
- It gave a starting point for further exploration about the parental relationship. It felt as though the client was being open and honest
- It gave the opportunity to open up the discussion about how the parental relationship is impacting on children. It highlighted strengths in the relationship as well as identifying where changes could be made. It also opened up the discussion about couple’s mediation
- It helped consider areas that perhaps would have otherwise been overlooked - however some of these just weren’t relevant
- It allowed an open discussion
- The Star did help to focus priority area to address however I do feel that this would have been achievable without lots of paperwork to complete
• The Star process helps with focus in an initial meeting however the mediation process does not lend itself to conduct Star readings due to time and confidentiality
• The Star was useful in so far as it provided a structure to facilitate the conversation. I could have managed without it however it might be useful to less experienced workers and also to ensure important areas are not omitted
• It works best when using it at outset

Are there any improvements you would like to suggest?
• It did not feel appropriate for use for those in an abusive relationship. The Star was very time consuming in this situation as it opened up some very sensitive issues which led to actions having to be addressed which meant it took more than one visit to complete the Star.
• I felt it needed to be completed by both partners to give a true picture of what is happening in relation to the children and this proved difficult. The parent tended to answer the questions in relation to what the partner is doing/not doing rather than seeing it in relation to themselves.
• I found the amount of paperwork proved to be a bit of a barrier to open, honest discussion - it meant discussion was quite disjointed
• I think the Star is perhaps more relevant where people don't know their issues. I'd already done the analysis
• Maybe a scale for communication with other
• Star doesn't take into consideration new partners or ex's i.e. couple split and each have new partners who are involved in child's life
• Streamline paperwork as much as possible so the focus of meetings can be an open, honest and uninterrupted discussion
• These clients had too many difficulties to possibly be able to fix them in 1 session and joint meeting - it was unrealistic and somewhat discouraging. This offering with the right amount of time would be excellent
**Family Star (Relationships) Parent Feedback**

Triangle received 30 completed feedback forms from parents using the Family Star (Relationships)

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**Do you think you completed Star is a good summary of your life and needs at the moment?**

- Yes very: 40%
- Yes a bit: 53%
- No: 7%

**I enjoyed completing the Relationship Star with my worker**

- Agree: 72%
- Unsure: 7%
- Disagree: 21%

**The scales helped me to understand what I need in the way of support**

- Agree: 80%
- Unsure: 10%
- Disagree: 10%

**The scales helped me to describe how life is for me at the moment**

- Agree: 77%
- Unsure: 3%
- Disagree: 20%
Parents’ open-ended feedback in response to the Family Star (Relationships)

What did you like about using the Family Star (Relationships)?

- It was good to see progress
- It was a good way of being honest. It felt relaxed and calm
- It helped focus discussion
- It helped me a lot and understand how to deal with situations and my relationship
- It helped me make changes to my life for me and my children
- It helps to clarify in your own mind your situation
- I just prefer visuals to work with. They make my life feel more simple
- It can help plan what to aim for
- It gives a scale of the gravity of various situations/ problems and how much effort to put into those issues
- It helped me see what I am living with and realise I need to change it for sake of the children
- It is a clear visual to the areas that require attention
- It is a good way to see what area needs improving and some areas you think are bad are better than you think
- It is easy to use and put my feelings in there
- It is practical and simple
- It put things into perspective
- It was tedious but understand why needed to be completed
- Just points to be made better
- Like the detail and scale system
• Makes me really think about some aspects of my life that need attention
• Not complicated to complete
• Not sure the Star is of any help in my situation
• Shows area where progress has been made and areas of improvement
• The scale range 1-10
• Understanding of different emotions
• Was able to show how I felt and show what talks and changes could be made to feel better

Are there any improvements you would like to suggest
• By the time reached the action plan and talked through the issues it was information overload. Shorter more concise version would be better
• Could be clearer about what Star is for
• Discard the shape and colours. A sharp pointy shape isn’t a shape you’d draw if you feel positive - they would be free flowing and curvy. Half the amount of points that have to be scored. Keep it to what matters. Behaviour, substance misuse, relationships, need met, wellbeing - those can be generalised and cover more that enough to gauge where someone’s life it at
• I can’t think of anything
• I feel like it was aimed at single parents
• It did not feel suitable for someone in my situation. I have just accepted that my relationship is abusive
• Maybe a copy so I can see results from start to finish
• My first mediation session so not easy to say what benefits have been achieved
• None it is a useful tool as it is
Appendix 2: Graphs showing the distribution of initial Star readings across the Journey of Change stages during the pilot of the Family Star (Relationships)
### Appendix 3: Table showing the pilot Family Star (Relationships) inter-item correlations

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<td>.51</td>
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<td><strong>8 Your well-being</strong></td>
<td>.33</td>
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<td>.26</td>
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